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ABSTRACT

This self-administered self-study examined a high school teacher's thought processes during the planning and teaching of lessons, and after the lessons had been completed--identifying levels of reflectivity, interactive thoughts, and decisions. Video tapes, teacher journal entries, and peer interviews were used to help stimulate recall and explore changes in teaching practices. The teaching units examined were two literature lessons for a class of 10th graders based on "The Contender" by Robert Lipsyte. Some of the reflection correlated with reading and research on John Dewey's ideas that learning must be based on experience and with the theory of construction of new knowledge through the use of charts and graphic organizers. The study components, journal entries and peer dialogues, did stimulate recall of thoughts and feelings and encouraged reflection. The self-study provided the subject with more insights than any other previous observations or evaluations. It also raised awareness of the complexity of thought processes and suggested the rethinking of routines and strategies. (Contains 25 references.) (JB)

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A Self-Study in Reflective Teaching

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Abstract

A growing understanding of the complexity of classroom interactions and environments has led to a shift in educational evaluation that attempts to understand what is happening in classrooms from the "insider's perspective." This self-study examines teacher thought processes that occur during planning, teaching and after lessons have been completed -- identifying the levels of reflectivity, interactive thoughts and decisions made by teachers. Video tapes, teacher journal entries and peer interviews were used to help stimulate recall and explore changes in teaching practices.

A Self-Study in Reflective Teaching

In most classroom observations, supervisors often use a checklist or record verbatim remarks or questions by teachers, while attempting to identify problems in lesson structure or classroom management techniques. During post-observation conferences, teachers are presented with "data" collected by the supervisor during these observations and recommendations or a plan of improvement is often discussed. And while the checklists used are often based on solid scientific research, teachers are seemingly presented with objective data, and specific goals to improve teacher performance are discussed, there is still something lacking in this process. Nowhere does how teachers think about what they are doing in the classroom and the complex environments in which they must perform enter into it. It is as if one attempted to analyze Shakespeare's Hamlet and what occurs on the stage without considering what the young Prince of Denmark is struggling with in his soliloquies. It is in reaction to the attempt to reduce teaching to a set of observable behaviors that the movement for reflective teaching and the desire for a more qualitative approach to looking at classrooms and teachers developed. Reflective teaching considers what the teacher thinks and feels about teaching to be key to teacher improvement.

In the discussion of reflective teaching and the self-study below, I will attempt to describe some of the important

elements of reflective teaching. And using journal writing videotaping and peer dialogue, I will explore my own thoughts and feelings while teaching two literature lessons to a class of tenth graders based on The Contender by Robert Lipsyte. Some of this reflection correlates with reading and research on Dewey's idea that learning must be based on experience and the construction of new knowledge through the use of charts and graphic organizers.

The Need for Reflective Teaching

Reflective teaching is based on Dewey's seminal work, How We Think (1933). According to Dewey, reflective thinking involves "intellectualization of the difficulty or perplexity that has been felt (directly experienced) into a problem to be solved, a question for which the answer must be sought..." (p. 107). In other words, experience demands that our thinking be channeled into problem solving; reflective thinking is inherent in the thinking process. Dewey believes that reflective thinking must be an educational aim because it "enables us to act in deliberate and intentional fashion to attain future objects or to come into command of what is now distant and lacking" (p. 17). Through reflective thinking we can act intelligently, create new inventions, and improve our lives. It is what has enabled us to advance from a "brutish" existence to a civilized one.

The notion that reflection plays an important role in how we think and that awareness of the thinking process, or metacognition, is essential to building higher order

knowledge is elaborated by Perkins (1992). Reflective learners not only engage in problem solving and decision making, but reflect on their "thinking in progress, ponder their strategies and revise them" (p. 102). If new ideas are the result of reflective thinking, then it is obvious that reflective thinking is key to changing and improving teaching. Zeichner & Liston (1987) point to the "liberating" effects of reflective teaching because it allows both students and teachers to "exercise their judgment about the content and processes of their work and to give some direction to the shape of schools as educational environments" (p. 24).

While Zeichner & Liston primarily address the potential of reflective teaching in teacher preparation, the implications for its use by experienced teachers are obvious. They argue that only by encouraging reflective inquiry will it be possible to reverse the "change but no change" that is so characteristic of our schools and teaching. This is similar to Trang & Caskey (1981) who argue that efforts to improve teacher effectiveness will fail if they are "isolated, coerced, emphasize mechanics and structure..." There are, however, major obstacles that hinder both student and teacher reflectivity. Perkins points to the prevailing "trivial pursuit" model of knowledge which prevails in the United States and in our schools. Despite all of the research that has been done on cognition and the evaluation of teaching practices, why are teachers resistant or unable

to introduce reflection into the classroom? It is because, Perkins suggests, teachers operate at a breakneck pace and are unable to reflect upon their own practice. It is preposterous to expect teachers to facilitate problem solving, reflection, and higher order thinking when they themselves are prevented from engaging in the practices necessary to produce them. Zeichner & Liston also believe that lack of time and the view that teaching is primarily a craft account for the lack of support among student teachers and cooperating teachers for programs that emphasize teacher reflectivity. Teachers may also be reluctant to engage in reflective activities because, as Wildman & Nlles (1987) point out, there is an element of personal risk involved: Teachers may be forced to deal with painful experiences or situations that occurred in the classroom and where they may have made mistakes.

A Description of Teacher Thought Processes

In order to more fully understand and interpret thought processes and reflection by teachers, it is important to identify the various levels of reflectivity. Van Manen (1977) and Schon (1983), in their description of reflectivity, identify the first level as primarily concerned with "technical rationality" or the application of educational knowledge to achieve certain goals. The second level, Van Manen believes, involves clarification and assessing the consequences of educational action. The third level entails "critical" reflection in which educational

institutions are critically analyzed in relation to more abstract notions of justice and equity. Smyth (1992) argues that to be truly liberating reflective teaching must encompass these broader issues and become "more politically informed." McDonald (1988) believes that teaching is "rooted in the teacher's own moral purpose and interests," is "oriented toward activities" and is characterized by "ambiguity, ambivalence and instability" (p. 482-483), the antithesis of technocratic decision making.

Clark & Peterson (1986) point out how researchers have failed to look beyond the "empty classroom" to understand that teaching children regularly includes "interruptions, surprises and digressions" (p. 268). This element of unpredictability and the complexity of classroom environments is discussed in detail by Doyle (1977) who considers the "multidimensionality" of the classroom environment. Teachers not only must deal with multiple events they also face:

> ...a multiplicity of tasks that include such matters as processing subject matter information, judging student abilities, managing classroom groups, coping with emotional responses to events and behaviors, and establishing procedures for routine and special assignments, distribution of resources and supplies, record keeping, etc. (p. 52)

Berliner (1986), in an article that discusses his research comparing expert pedagogues with ordinary or novice teachers, observes that teaching takes place within two large and complex "domains of knowledge" that include "subject matter knowledge" and "knowledge of organizations and management of classrooms," which the teacher must integrate.

He even goes so far as to state that the problems teachers attempt to solve may be even greater than those of expert physicists! It is because of the complexity of classroom interactions and environment that a shift has occurred in educational evaluation from a quantitative approach to one that attempts to understand what is happening in classrooms from "the insider's perspective," "mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience or think about various phenomena..." (Fetterman, 1988, p. 21) Similarly, Zahorik (1975), as well as Clark & Peterson, in reaction to Tyler (1949) who emphasized a linear, unidirectional approach to educational activities, emphasize the more complex elements that inform teaching and teacher thought processes. Clark & Peterson break down teacher thought processes into three areas: 1) planning, (2) interactive thoughts and decisions and 3) theories and beliefs. They also identify the thought process which takes place prior to a lesson and which serve as a guide for future planning and describe the process of insight and reflection which occurs during the performance of the lesson itself.

A Self-Study

Developing reflective skills can be done using a variety of techniques. Journal writing enables the teacher to record the "internal reality" of teaching (Acheson & Gall, 1992) and allows teachers to discuss why they chose a particular course of action or strategy. Copeland (1986) argues that it is important to give teachers guidance and feedback on their

journal entries. They should be encouraged to address the dilemmas they face in planning and teaching, to reflect on what is happening in the school and community, and to explore philosophical issues and beliefs about teaching (Van Manen's third level of reflectivity). This study used three journal entries for each lesson to stimulate recall of thought processes during the planning stages, as the lesson was being taught, and after the lesson was completed. In addition, these journal entries were read out loud to a peer teacher who reacted with questions to help stimulate reflection even further and to explore possible changes in teaching strategies and style. This technique of using peer inquiry was developed by Trang & Caskey (1981) in their instructional improvement model using videotaping. This self-study also used videotaping and peer questions, in addition to journal entries, to further stimulate recall. Extensive quotes from the journal entries and teacher/peer dialogues are reprinted below because they reveal the levels of reflectivity described by Schon and Van Manen and provide insights into the thinking process while teaching. They give the reader a feel for the texture and the complexities of the teaching process, as well as what is going on inside the teacher's mind.

The first lesson used in this self-study was a literature lesson that addressed four conflicts and the problems they present to the main character, Alfred Brooks, in the novel The Contender. Some of these conflicts include whether he

should help a gang rob the store in which he works, and whether he should stay friendly with someone who wants to associate with the gang. The lesson used a chart to identify these conflicts and problems. Class discussion centered on the degree of Alfred Brooks' culpability for the attempted robbery because he had supplied the gang with essential information that money had been left in the store overnight. Here are some of the thoughts and feelings I had while planning this lesson that appear in a journal entry:

> This lesson is meant to bring out the obvious tension areas which would have to be dealt with by the main character. I want to illustrate the problems so students can see what the main character is up against. I am also trying to prepare them for the reading assignment they were given as homework. I think that it is well planned and will move in the class, but it may not hold their interest because they are used to doing shorter works. I feel, however, it is the most interesting way to present the events that appear at this point in the novel, and it sets the foundation for teaching the rest of it. I am concerned that students will get lost if they are left to read it on their own.

This journal entry deals primarily with Van Manen's first level of reflectivity; in this instance, whether using a chart will facilitate understanding. In the course of discussing this journal entry with a peer, I became aware of how my reading of Ausubel, Novak, & Hanesian (1978) and Marzano, Brant, Hughes, Jones, et al (1990) on the use of frameworks and advanced organizers had prompted me to think about what I was doing in this lesson from a cognitive perspective. This connection would not have been made had it not been for this journal entry and dialogue.

The second journal entry for this lesson describes the feelings and thoughts I had while teaching the lesson:

> I thought that the class was doing well in answering the questions. I was unsure whether or not the class would be able to come up with the right answers to put into the chart. I thought they would fail to see the bigger issue of Alfred losing his job as a result of the robbery and how his best friend will go along with the robbery and the reasons why. I was pleased that students brought up the issue of whether it was believable that Alfred could forget about the alarm. Since the lesson was going well, I decided to add an additional conflict in the last few minutes of the lesson to further illustrate the conflicts and tensions between the two major characters.

While this journal entry again deals primarily with the technical issue of whether students will be able to accomplish the task of completing the chart, the phrase, "since the lesson was going well," indicates that I was prepared or ready to use an alternative strategy if this one were to fail -- a multifaceted attempt to address this concern. It also reveals the importance of experience in teacher strategizing; only a more experienced teacher who has built up a reservoir of strategies can substitute another strategy when one fails.

The third journal entry was written after the lesson was viewed on videotape:

> It was obvious to me that there was no improvising added to the lesson; I was too worried about the lesson being videotaped. I was surprised that the lesson was not as much fun as I had planned it to be; it seemed a little boring at times. Examples could have been used to make the novel come to life more. Perhaps more analogies and teaching using real life experiences could have been made. However, there seemed to be enough student interest to get me through it. The video may have caused a Hawthorne effect. The leap from the motivation about Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan to the lesson itself was not clear until the final summary. A better transition was needed here.

This journal entry reflects concern with student responses and whether the lesson makes connections to the real world. These concerns seem to go beyond purely technical issues and begin to raise the question of whether what is being done in the classroom is of real importance or relevance in the lives of students (Van Manen's second level of reflectivity).

Segments of the videotape of the lesson were then played and a peer dialogue followed. The first question I was asked was about the motivation which referred to the role of Tonya Harding in the attack on Nancy Kerrigan before the 1994 winter Olympics.

Peer: How were you feeling at this point in the lesson?
Teacher: I am very pleased with the reaction to the motivation. You are never sure if it is going to interest them. A lesson may look good on paper, but often it doesn't work when you actually do it.

After watching another segment which showed the transition from the motivation to the body of the lesson another dialogue followed:

Peer: What were your thinking at this point?
Teacher: I wondered if I was really making the connection between the motivation and the novel. I was thinking that I should refer more directly to the novel to make it more concrete.
Peer: What would you have changed?
Teacher: I would have referred to parts of the book. I really needed to plunge into the content at this point.

Both excerpts show a concern for real life issues (Van Manen's level two) and how they could be fit into the structure of the lesson. The emphasis here is both on

motivation and lesson planning and creating an organic connection between the classroom and the outside world -- between the text and the actual experiences of students. Attempts to refine and improve the motivations used in lessons surfaced as a concern in the journal entries used in this study.

Clark & Peterson (1986) examine six studies of teacher "interactive" thought which had very similar findings. In these studies, it was shown that thoughts about the instructional process, which included instructional strategies, ranged from 20% to 30% The largest percentage (40% to 60%) was concerned with the learner. In examining the journal entries and dialogues used in this self-study, we see that there is an overriding concern with the instructional process and the learner, which is consistent with these studies. This can be seen especially in the reactions to a segment of the first videotape while the chart on conflicts and problems was being completed:

> Peer: How were you feeling at this point?
> Teacher: I was glad they got the right answers and were still tuned in. I was also wondering at this point how they feel about coming to my class. Is this one of their better classes or do they dread coming here? What do I do that is different than other teachers?

This, too, reflects a strong interest in whether students find the class stimulating and "the consequences of educational action" found in Van Manen's second level of reflectivity.

The reflections in the journal entries of the second lesson used in this study and the dialogues that followed segments of the second videotape also centered largely on motivation and the instructional process. In addition, they reflected the cognitive process described by Marland (1977) and Conners (1978) (as cited in Clark & Peterson, p. 269-273) that include perceptions (intuitions about and observations of the class), interpretations (the meaning given to events by teachers), anticipations (speculative thoughts), and reflections (thoughts about past events).

Here is the journal entry about my thoughts and feelings during the second lesson:

> I was worried that students were finding the chart too tedious and that they might not make the right connections. They couldn't see the differences between the way the character ran up the stairs the first time and the way he did it the second time, something which revealed an important change in the character. Some things became too difficult to elicit and I had to draw them closer to the answers I was looking for. Other things appeared too easy and they didn't seem to struggle enough. Nonetheless, the before and after approach that I was using provided a springboard for students to discuss the affective traits of the characters.

The perceptions discussed in this journal entry relate to the responses by students and the difficulties they were having in completing the chart. The interpretation I gave these perceptions was that students found the chart activity confusing. At each juncture in the lesson, I speculated on whether or not they would be able to successfully complete the chart using quotes from the text to demonstrate their understanding of the novel by the end of the lesson.

Although it was not included in the journal entry, I did reflect at the end of the lesson about the difficulties presented by the chart. I was relieved that students had been able to not only complete the chart, but use it to answer a summary question.

The viewing of the videotape led to perceptions about my physical movements while teaching, interpretations about the motivation, and complex reflections about the previous day's lesson and my own experiences in connection with the issue of whether or not it is better to learn things the "hard way":

Peer: What are you feeling at this point?
Teacher: I am feeling that despite the fact that the motivation in this lesson is weaker and less interesting than the previous lesson, it is really worked into the fabric of the lesson, and students are making the right connections.
Peer: Was there an image or picture in your mind at this point?
Teacher: In asking if it is better to learn things the hard way or the easy way, I thought about when I first took up cross country skiing and how I chose to use waxable skis instead of waxless, which are easier to handle.
Peer: Is there anything you want to change?
Teacher: I move around too much. I'm nervous and afraid that they won't do the work.

Conclusion

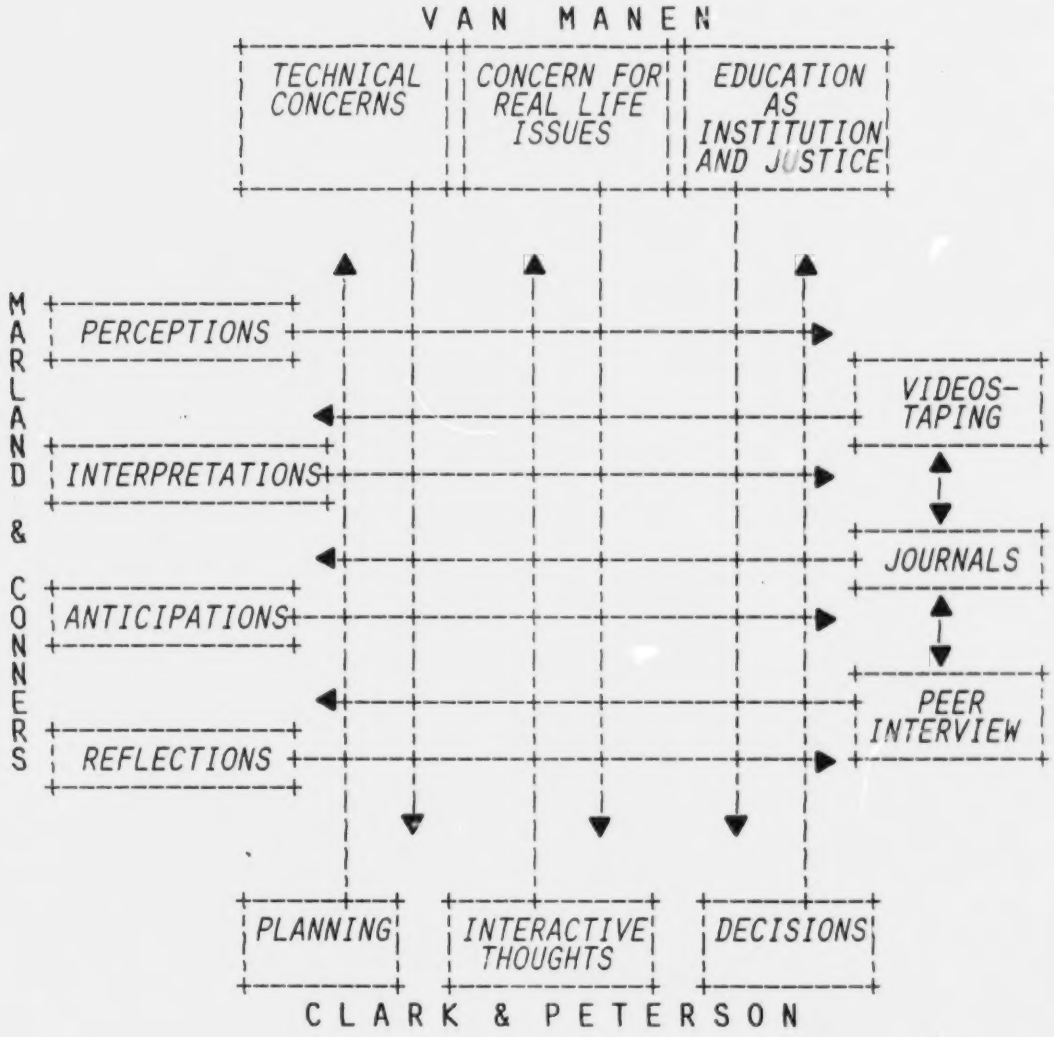
The journal entries and peer dialogues for this self-study did, indeed, stimulate recall of thoughts and feelings and encouraged reflection. Van Manen's three levels of reflectivity are considered by Wedman & Martin (1986) to provide a general "framework" for assessing reflection. They also argue that it is necessary to refine journal questions to "encourage thinking on all three levels." The cognitive

processes described by Marland and Conners reveal the complexities of teachers' thought process and enable teachers to gain important insights into the metacognitive web that surrounds their practice. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1990) criticize much of the literature on teachers' thinking processes that appears in The Handbook of Research on Teaching (Wittrock, 1986), including the chapter by Clark & Peterson cited above, as being artificial because these studies are not generated by teachers. While they consider these studies to be goundbreaking, they feel that because the studies were designed by researchers and not the teachers themselves they can only partially guide classroom practitioners who they are designed to help. Perhaps this self-study will serve as a step in the direction of research by practitioners on teachers thought processes and classroom instruction.

This reflective self-study provided me with more insights than any observations or evaluations that I have experienced. It made me more aware of how complex my own thought processes are in the course of planning and executing even a single lesson. It also made me realize that while I am teaching there are important perceptions, understandings and associations that provide the dynamic for every lesson and account for their intricacy. It also led me to rethink some of the routines and strategies that I have come to rely on in the classroom. It is important that the teacher be encouraged during the process of reflection to think about

making changes and viewing more critically the educational process. It is only by doing so that teachers will make meaningful changes in how they teach and think about their profession.

LEVELS OF REFLECTIVITY AND TEACHER THOUGHT PROCESSES



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